



CHARLES RIVER EDITORS

THE HOLODOMOR

The History and Legacy of the Ukrainian Famine
Engineered by the Soviet Union

The Holodomor: The History and Legacy of the Ukrainian Famine Engineered by the Soviet Union

By Charles River Editors



A picture of starving peasants

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Introduction



“What are the causes of the famine? The main reason for the catastrophe in Russian agriculture is the Soviet policy of collectivisation. The prophecy of Paul Scheffer in 1920–30 that collectivisation of agriculture would be the nemesis of Communism has come absolutely true.” – Gareth Jones

Famine – one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse in the Book of Revelation – continues to be one of the most crippling and destructive scourges of humanity. This inexorable affliction, traumatically fatal in the worst-case scenarios, has terrorized every single continent at some point throughout history, some more so than others. Perhaps the most famous was the notorious Irish Potato Famine of 1845, during which a noxious, fungus-like microorganism known as the “*Phytophthora infestans*” destroyed half of Ireland's potatoes and three-fourths of the crop in the following seven years, resulting in the deaths of 1.5 million and the forced migration of some two million citizens. The catastrophic Bengal Famine of 1943, which was precipitated by a dreadful cyclone and tidal waves the previous year, led to the deaths of an estimated seven million Bengalis.

Among some of history's famines, the Holodomor's death toll is considerably lower than others, such as the the Chalisa and South India

Famines between 1782 to 1784, which killed roughly 11 million people altogether, or the Chinese Famine of 1907, which claimed up to 25 million lives in northern China. The Holodomor, however, which ravaged Ukraine between 1932 and 1933, was not a natural occurrence, but a ghastly man-made famine brought about by Stalinist policies.

When Ukraine was incorporated into the Soviet Union, communist ideology was enforced on every part of society, religion was effectively prohibited, and dissenters were sent to the Gulag prison camps. The church was an early target for the communists, as many buildings and religious icons were vandalized and believers were mocked.

As awful as that all was, Stalin's economic plans were especially disastrous for Ukrainians. This Holodomor, calculatedly inflicted to serve the dictator's agenda, as well as to suppress Ukrainian nationalism and stamp out those who dared resist the regime, consequently resulted in the avoidable deaths of anywhere between 3.9 million and 10 million Ukrainian civilians. It was equivalent to roughly 25% of the population, a third of them children, and the victims all died in less than two years. One historian of the Soviet Union, Anne Applebaum, charted these events in her book *Red Famine*,^[1] concluding that the "Soviet Union's disastrous decision to force peasants to give up their land and join collective farms; the eviction of 'kulaks,' the wealthier peasants, from their homes; the chaos that followed"—these policies were 'all ultimately the responsibility of Joseph Stalin, the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party.'"^[2]

While Ukrainians marked this tragedy as the Holodomor (a composite of the Ukrainian words hunger (*holod*) and extermination (*mor*)), and the modern Ukrainian state recognized the period as a genocide in 2006, the Holodomor was deliberately swept under the rug for several decades. As a result, it remains widely unacknowledged to this day, and the nature of the famine – particularly whether it should be considered a genocide – is still debated by scholars.

The Holodomor: The History and Legacy of the Ukrainian Famine Engineered by the Soviet Union examines the events that brought about the famine and its terrible toll. Along with pictures of important people and places, you will learn about the Holodomor like never before.

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Red Suppression

“Ideas are far more powerful than guns. We don't let our people have guns. Why should we let them have ideas?” – attributed to Joseph Stalin

The inconceivable horrors of the genocidal famine now remembered as the “Holodomor” was not something that developed overnight. Quite the opposite, the grim path that led to this horrendous period in Ukrainian history was flanked by innumerable red flags. One must therefore examine the precursory series of events – namely, Ukraine's complex struggle for independence and its turbulent relationship with Russia, particularly in the first two decades of the 20th century, as well as the Soviet authorities' long-standing crusade against the *kulak* – in order to better understand how this atrocious man-made famine came to pass.

Ukraine, which evolved from its original name *Oukraina*, meaning “outskirts” or “borderland,” was once among the most affluent and fruitful regions in all of Europe, known for its cornucopia of coal, iron, and other mineral deposits, as well as its rich and fertile soil, allowing for the vigorous production of wheat. Naturally, neighboring powerhouses fought to acquire this coveted territory. The Russian Empire, spearheaded by Catherine the Great, emerged victorious in this tug-of-war with the signing of the Second Partition of Poland on January 23, 1793, after which the greater part of Ukraine was absorbed into its domain. The principality of Galicia in western Ukraine, however, remained under the Austro-Hungarian Empire's jurisdiction.

Ukrainians yearned for autonomy and a distinctive identity, a sentiment that became especially apparent between the mid-1800s and early 1900s, during which Ukraine underwent a patriotic revival. This thirst for freedom was reignited by a serf named Taras Shevchenko, a poet, painter, thinker, and the foremost figure of the movement, who promoted unique Ukrainian traditions and ideals through his literary works, artistic masterpieces, and poignant, thought-provoking commentary. In “My Friendly Epistle,” which he dedicated to his “dead, living, and unborn countrymen in and outside Ukraine,” Shevchenko urged his compatriots to educate themselves on their rights and heritage, so that they may give rise to “the glory of [their] own

Ukraine.” Shevchenko, along with the other figures who brought forth this renewed quest for independence, were commended for their bravery in speaking out against Tsarist Russia, for this was a time when expressing such ideas, partaking in pro-independence or cultural organizations, and the mere usage of the Ukrainian language were punishable by incarceration, exile, or death.



Shevchenko

In some respects, Ukraine was beginning to thrive at the start of the 20th century. It had become one of the industrial and agricultural mainstays of the Russian Empire and was developing quicker than most of the other provinces. This would make the allure of autonomy more attractive to some, but it also made the pressure on Russia to keep Ukraine within its orbit greater.

The tsar attempted various reforms leading up to World War I, but his court was deeply dysfunctional, as demonstrated by the ability of the notorious Rasputin to worm his way into influence. In addition, and more dangerously, left-wing forces were circling the regime. A broad, often uneasy coalition of socialists, communists, anarchists, and social democrats had brought about the 1905 uprising, and the tsar's constitutional reforms only emboldened many of them. Whereas countries developing into liberal democracies would compromise and attempt to bring moderate reformers into the mainstream, the Russian Empire was apparently incapable of satisfying any voices demanding change. This meant that pressure continued to build in the final decades of the tsar's rule.

Some of the most radical were the Bolshevik communists led by Vladimir Lenin and a ramshackle group of revolutionaries and intellectuals, many of whom had been exiled or imprisoned. They proposed a complete overhaul of the system, a command economy, an egalitarian society, and an apparently transitional phase - a "dictatorship of the proletariat" articulated by Lenin as a bridge to a communist Russia. Leon Trotsky was another prominent left-wing intellectual, and other groups, including the Mensheviks, had many supporters, including anarchists inspired by 19th century thinker Mikhail Bakunin. Moreover, nationalists in many of the provinces also wanted a change to the status quo. As such, all of these groups would be thrown into the maelstrom of the 1910s and 1920s.

It is often overlooked that much of the fighting on the Eastern Front during World War I took place in Ukraine, and Austrian-ruled Ukraine saw fighting almost immediately. The Schlieffen Plan was initiated by Germany and seemed to be working as the Germans had hoped in the early weeks of the war. Although having experienced some resistance in Belgium, the Germans rapidly made their way into French territory and seemed to threaten Paris itself. At the same time, to the east, they also inflicted early losses on the Russian Army.

However, when the fighting reached Galicia in Austrian Ukraine, the Russians had some success, albeit against the Austrians rather than the more formidable Germans. As a sign of the brutal nature of the war, hundreds of thousands of men were killed in the early skirmishes in Galicia,

but the Russians began pushing the Austrians back and moving the fighting to the Carpathian Mountains.^[3]

The Eastern Front continued in this fashion for three years. Compared to the trenches on the Western Front, the war between Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary in the east was more fluid, with the lines moving constantly and ensuring Ukraine was constantly a battlefield. Generally, the Germans slowly but surely held the advantage over the Russians in a grim war of attrition, the likes of which had not been seen by the world to that point. This would continue until the first of two revolutions crippled Russia in early 1917 and eventually took the Russians out of the war.

The war was complicated for Ukrainians, who fought on both sides. Some Ukrainian troops saw this as an opportunity to liberate their country from foreign domination, and some units, particularly on the Austrian side, formed autonomous fighting brigades. On the Russian side, the League for the Liberation of Ukraine was formed. Although primarily in the service of the larger powers, many Ukrainian soldiers with nationalist tendencies were fighting a proto-war of liberation, reflective of how Ukraine had been partitioned over centuries. These sentiments would surface again in the coming decades, leading to mistrust on the Russian side and intermittent attempts to gain more autonomy and even full independence on the Ukrainian side. The early 20th century made clear that Ukraine was never truly an integral part of Russia, as Russian nationalists liked to believe. In fact, throughout the Great War, the motivations of Ukrainian troops were deemed suspicious by both the Austrians and Russians.

When the tsar abdicated in 1917, a provisional government led by Alexander Kerensky was formed, and it attempted to implement reforms while continuing the war. This was deeply resented by a population fed up with the conflict, and that sentiment was capitalized upon by Lenin's Bolsheviks, who organized a coup and took power that October. A second Russian Revolution was now underway that would drag the region in a more radical direction.

The Bolsheviks sought to end the fighting on the Eastern Front by signing the Brest-Litovsk Treaty in early 1918. The terms of the treaty were tough on Russia, so much so that the Central Powers appeared to apply victor's

justice on Russia in terms of territory changes. Leon Trotsky, a key negotiator, believed that Germany was close to its own revolution, meaning the Brest-Litovsk agreement would have been shelved anyway. That was, in fact, the case, but it happened for different reasons, and Germany would be taken over by leaders who considered the Soviet Union a mortal enemy.

Events moved quickly in Ukraine as the Russian Empire dissolved. Political leaders and elites (at least to the extent that they existed at the time) moved rapidly to form an autonomous Ukrainian state. A Central *Rada* (parliament) was convened in Kiev in March 1917, and a commission was set up to seek out the best way forward. When the commission delivered its report in June, it had decided to form a Ukrainian state linked with Russia in a federation, with the two states being equitable in the arrangement.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Bolsheviks had other ideas. They first attempted to unsuccessfully foster a communist takeover in Kiev, only to have better luck in Kharkiv in the east of the country. Thus, the situation remained tense and somewhat chaotic going into 1918. After Brest-Litovsk, it was the Germans who provided assistance to the proto-Ukrainian state, which declared complete independence at the start of 1918. The Germans, however, sought to promote an anti-Russian and anti-socialist administration. The war was still raging on the Western Front, after all, and Berlin wanted to neutralize the situation in the east so the Germans could safely divert troops to fight the British, French, and Americans in Flanders.

[4]

As a result, a new Hetmanate was established in April 1918, led by Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi, harking back to the days of the Cossack state. An anti-socialist, Skoropadskyi relied on German military support and the old elite to maintain power. To many, including the Bolsheviks, this meant the Hetmanate was a “White” power representing the old status quo, vaguely aligned with monarchist forces. The Bolsheviks therefore positioned themselves as the “Reds,” vehicles of radical change, more rights for workers, freedom from oppression by the authorities, land reform, and other socialist ideals. That few of these promises would ever come to

fruition was beyond the point at this time, because in 1918, the promises contributed to the turmoil enveloping Ukraine.

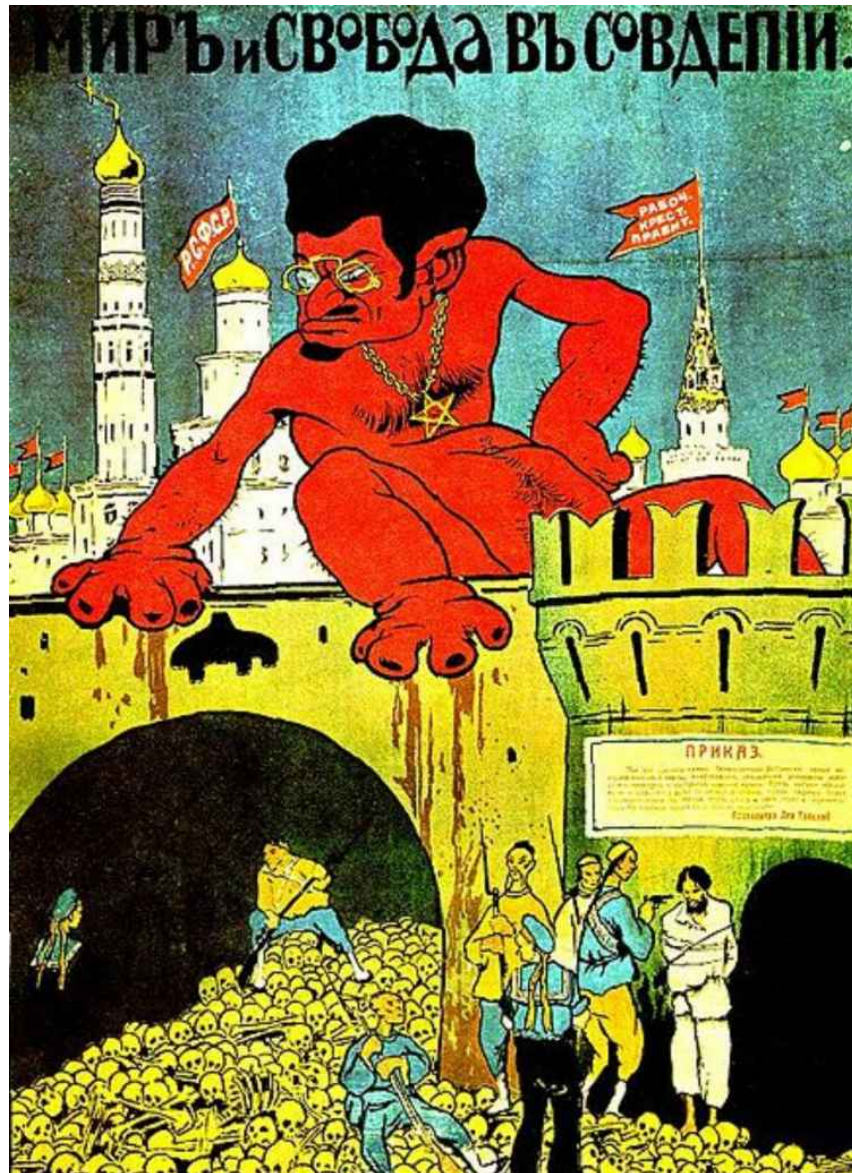
When World War I ended with Germany's defeat in November 1918, The Brest-Litovsk Treaty was rendered essentially void and would be supplanted by the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, negotiated in Paris in the months after the war. Germany's humbling would also mean that the Ukrainian Hetmanate was completely exposed to the Bolsheviks, and it duly collapsed in December 1918. Ukraine would then be drawn into the vortex of the Russian Civil War, which lasted into the 1920s and saw the ultimate triumph of the Bolshevik Reds over the Whites. Communism was installed in Ukraine, becoming a component of a new imperial project: the Soviet Union. As a result, Ukrainians would have to wait another 70 years before finally achieving independence.

Just as quickly as the Bolsheviks took power in Russia, their political opponents aimed to oust them. These enemies, including Tsarists, liberals, and anti-Bolshevik leftists, all arrayed in violent and intractable opposition, often with significant foreign support. The Bolsheviks initially counted on a spontaneous campaign of support from the working classes, but the organizational weaknesses of their loyal force, the Red Guard, soon displayed themselves. Trotsky was placed in charge of organizing the new Red Army that would defend the fragile revolutionary state against foes both native and foreign. Just after peace had been settled in Germany, it was time again to prepare for war.

The forces of the so-called White Army, made up of anti-Bolshevik Russians of all stripes, and their allies from nearly all the major European nations, combined to place the new revolutionary regime in a state of siege. In response, the Bolsheviks introduced a number of policies that would set the stage for the state terrorism and suppression of later years.

At the same time, despite the Cheka security service's best efforts, those who opposed Lenin were gunning for him, literally. In January 1918, gunmen shot at Lenin and Fritz Platten as they sat in an automobile after Lenin had given a speech, which Lenin survived after Platten pushed him down and shielded him. But the most famous assassination attempt would come in August 1918, when a supporter of the Socialist Revolutionary

Party, Fanya Kaplan, approached Lenin as he sat in an automobile. After calling to him to get his attention, she fired at him three times, hitting him once in the arm and once in the jaw and neck. Though the wounds rendered him unconscious, Lenin survived the shooting, and fearful of people at the hospital who might try to finish the job, he returned to the Kremlin and ordered physicians to come there to treat him where he felt safe. Ultimately, doctors refused to perform surgery given the precarious position of the bullet in his neck. Pravda used the attempt for propaganda purposes, reporting, "Lenin, shot through twice, with pierced lungs spilling blood, refuses help and goes on his own. The next morning, still threatened with death, he reads papers, listens, learns, and observes to see that the engine of the locomotive that carries us towards global revolution has not stopped working..."



White Army propaganda poster depicting Trotsky as Satan

The Bolsheviks may have downplayed the assassination attempt publicly, but they were privately plotting retaliation on a massive scale. Two weeks before Kaplan's attempt on Lenin's life, the Petrograd Cheka chief Moisei Uritsky had been assassinated, and now Stalin suggested to Lenin that they should engage in "open and systematic mass terror...[against] those responsible." Thus, the Cheka, under the instruction of Stalin, launched what later came to be known as the "Red Terror" in response to the assassination attempt. In the weeks that followed, more than 800 people were executed, including the entire Romanov family. This, however, was

just the beginning. As the Bolsheviks, known popularly as the Red Russians fought an ongoing war against those who opposed socialism (the White Russians), more than 18,000 people were executed on charges related to opposing Lenin and his rule. While historians have often debated the extent of Lenin's personal involvement in the executions, Trotsky himself later asserted that it was Lenin who authorized the execution of the Russian Royal Family.

Unfortunately, bullets weren't all that was killing the Russian common people. While the Whites and Reds engaged in a civil war that would last for nearly seven years, ordinary Russians were starving due to war time communism measures that allowed the Soviet government to confiscate food for soldiers from peasant farms with little or no payment. When the farmers retaliated by growing fewer crops, the Cheka responded by executing or imprisoning the offending peasants. However, even the Cheka could not cause plants to grow, and during the Famine of 1921, more than 5 million Russians starved to death in and near their own homes. This tragedy, along with the civil unrest it provoked, led Lenin to institute the New Economic Policy to rejuvenate the both agriculture and industry.

In formulating his economic policies, Lenin asserted, "We must show the peasants that the organization of industry on the basis of modern, advanced technology, on electrification, which will provide a link between town and country, will put an end to the division between town and country, will make it possible to raise the level of culture in the countryside and to overcome, even in the most remote corners of land, backwardness, ignorance, poverty, disease, and barbarism." Of course, to Lenin that meant total state control over industry, and he implemented a system in which every industry was overseen by one ruling official granted all the deciding power over any disputes, thereby completely curbing workers' self-management rights.

For Ukrainians, the civil war made clear that the Bolsheviks had tenuous control of the country in the aftermath of their coup in October 1917, which ensured disorder, several changes of government, and violence on a huge scale across Ukraine. Ukraine was one of many of the former provinces that considered the Bolshevik Revolution and Russian Civil War as an

opportunity to form an independent country. The modern states of Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as well as places that are still part of Russia, such as Chechnya and Dagestan, were all involved in the conflict. Along with the inter-state nature of the war, it was also a civil war that pitted different groups against each other within countries. As a massive component of the former Russian Empire, Ukraine was strategically important and in fact could see an enlargement of territory if the Bolsheviks could seize the western part of Ukraine that had been ruled by the Austrian Habsburgs.

The fighting in the civil war incorporated numerous groups in Ukraine - as well as the Ukrainian nationalists and pro-communist forces, there were non-aligned groups, Poles and even some Entente troops. Historians have noted that the Russian Civil War was in fact more devastating for Ukraine than the First World War, with approximately 1.5 million people believed to have been killed in the fighting. ^[5]

A group of anarchists attempted to carve out the “Free Territory of Ukraine” or “Makhnovia” in the southeast of the country, which existed in some form until 1921. The “West Ukrainian People’s Republic” was set up in the former Austrian lands, focused on Lviv. The 1920 Treaty of Warsaw, however, attempted to cede some of this territory into Poland while Kiev itself was also keen to bring this western region into Ukraine proper. A Ukrainian People’s Republic also formed during the civil war years, based in Kiev until 1921.

Nevertheless, all these separate efforts would eventually come to little because the Red Army and Trotsky triumphed in the civil war and brought all the provinces into the Soviet Union. There would also be some more territorial exchange at the Treaty of Riga between Poland and the Soviets. Poland managed to gain control over much of the former Austrian Ukraine, including Lviv although this would be relatively short-lived. The Baltic states, too, would gain independence as a result of these post-war treaties. For Ukraine, however, its brief period of autonomy was over.

The USSR obviously had a different character compared to the Russian Empire. Its separate parts were established as Socialist Republics which then became part of the broader Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

(USSR). Ukraine was therefore renamed the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, which theoretically might have given the country more say over its affairs. But in reality it meant Ukraine was drawn just as tightly into Russia's web, now governed from Moscow rather than the Tsarist capital of St. Petersburg. The Bolsheviks were renamed the Communist Party, all other political parties were outlawed, and nationalism, in particular, was frowned upon. Marxist-Leninist ideology was all encompassing, and to some extent unifying. As a result, while Soviet Ukraine, like the other territories of the USSR, was officially recognized as the "Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic," it was no more than a nominal title. Under the constitution of the multinational federation, which was instituted in January of 1924, these "republics" were technically vested with the power of secession. Even so, Ukraine had no control over their military, foreign commerce, and international relations whatsoever; their authority was restricted to domestic matters.

The Bolsheviks' rancorous detestation of the *kulak* began long before Stalin's accession to power. For starters, the *kulak*, the Russian word for "fist," was a derogatory term coined by the Bolsheviks for the "prosperous peasants" of rural Russia. Back in the days of feudalism, every village or manor in the Russian countryside, as per the open-field system, was endowed with at least two rolling fields, which were sectioned into long, narrow plots of land known as "selions." Serfs, or tenants were typically apportioned two selions each, which they cultivated throughout the year. The harvests yielded from one selion were surrendered to their landlords, and the crops produced from the other selion they kept for themselves.

Following the formal dissolution of feudalism in 1861, the former tenants retained ownership of the latter selions, which they then ceded to their local peasant commune, essentially an independent union established by ex-serfs who once shared a landlord. Likewise, the selions previously cultivated for the serfs' masters, along with all the forested lands and pastures within the vicinity remained in the possession of the landlords. As grateful as the now-liberated serfs were for their newfound independence, this freedom came at a price, as they were now deprived of access to timber and grazing lands.

Many of the former landowners, who spotted and were unable to resist the opportunity for profit, levied taxes upon the peasants who wished to avail themselves of these pastoral territories. Some peasants chose to grin and bear it and forked over the charges; others circumvented these hefty taxes by transforming a portion of their land into grazing areas for their livestock. Thus, disgruntled landlords who did not take kindly to the peasants' self-sufficiency imposed tolls on the selions under their name, which were interspersed throughout the peasant communities. Any animal that wandered over to or across the landlords' selions were thereby subject to taxation. Those in need of timber had no other alternative but to tend to the landowners' selions, and were compensated in wood.

The Communist Bolsheviks resented the idea of being excluded from the profits accrued by these landowners, or any other privately-owned enterprise for that matter. They were, however, particularly rankled by the new echelon of peasant landowners that materialized following the Stolypin agrarian reforms of 1906. Peasants could now secure extra parcels of farmland, as well as forested and pastoral acreages from landowners on credit. The earnings they fetched from their farms and augmented estates were used to pay off said credit. Within six years, up to 16% of Russian peasants were classed as wealthy farmers, who oftentimes outsourced agricultural work to poorer peasants.

These upper-class peasants, denounced by the Bolsheviks as *kulaks*, were vilified as “bloodsuckers, vampires, plunderers of the people, and profiteers who fatten on famine.” They were declared hostile foes of the working class, and according to Lenin, “who exploit[ed] the labor of others, either hiring them for work, or lending them money at interest...[and supported] the landowners and capitalists – the enemies of the Soviet power.”

Needless to say, when the Bolsheviks took power and rolled out their collectivist policies nationwide, the *kulaks* – outraged by the government's sudden entitlement to their property, as well as the precious fruits of their labor – revolted. Lenin himself refused to tolerate any form of insubordination, and in August of 1918 he issued the following directive to the commissars stationed in the city of Penza in western Russia, now referred to as “Lenin's Hanging Order”: “Comrades! The revolt by the five

kulak volosts must be suppressed without mercy...We need to set an example. You need to hang – hang without fail, and do it so that the public sees – at least 100 notorious *kulaks*...Publish their names. Take away all of their grain. Execute the hostages...This needs to be accomplished in such a way that people for hundreds of miles around will see, tremble, know, and scream out...Let us choke and strangle those blood-sucking *kulaks*...”

Unbeknownst to many, the Holodomor was not the first major food shortage that the masses experienced under the Bolshevik regime. Between the spring of 1921 and the winter of 1922, an estimated 5 million Russians and Ukrainians succumbed to illness and starvation in what is now known as the “Povolzhye Famine,” brought about by a string of severe droughts. War Communism – a Bolshevik economic policy implemented during and lasting a year after the Russian Civil War (1918-1920), which saw the authorities confiscate all the surplus grain and cereals that peasants usually kept in reserve for such purposes – undisputedly worsened their plight. Lenin eventually swallowed his pride and accepted much-needed assistance from a number of international aid agencies, among them the American Relief Association.

Throughout the period of Lenin’s illness and the successful winding down of the Civil War, the issues that had divided the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks two decades before reemerged as subjects of practical debate. First of all, there was an economic debate about whether the confiscatory policies of “War Communism” should continue. The Bolsheviks had to decide whether to move the country rapidly toward a communistic model of production as envisioned by Marx, or whether there should be a loosening of restrictions on economic activity in order to foster and incentivize a resurgence of production after many harsh years of war. The latter proposal proceeded from the old assumption that the under-industrialized Soviet economy was not yet ready for the transition to full-scale socialism, and therefore needed to undergo further capitalistic development with this ultimate goal in mind. In part because of the strikes and uprisings provoked by the harsh regime of “War Communism,” the Bolshevik leadership ultimately acceded to this more liberalized regime, dubbed the “New Economic Policy.”

A second question reprised in these years was the question of how centralized the party, and therefore the state, should be. Should trade unions and other workers' organizations be able to obtain some autonomy? Trotsky, who took charge of rebuilding the national railways after the end of the Civil War, initially argued against trade union autonomy, but soon after that he came to criticize the increasing concentration of power among the party's inner circle. Of course, that concentration of power was being led by Stalin in his capacity as General Secretary of the party, and it was accepted by his allies Kamenev and Zinoviev.

The factional struggles of the Bolsheviks in the 1920's make for a convoluted story, but they can be understood as ideological struggles over how to implement communism and personal struggles between highly ambitious men. The splits within the party continued the fundamental questions about party organization that divided the Bolsheviks from their opponents in the first place. Stalin and his allies opted for a model of highly concentrated and centralized power wielded by a small revolutionary vanguard, while Trotsky and the so-called Left Opposition advocated a greater openness and pluralism advanced through the democratic institution of the Soviets. This is not to say that Trotsky took a more tolerant view of opposition to the Bolshevik agenda; he had personally advocated the persecution of Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries, and other rivals on the left, consigning them in one famous speech to the "dustbin of history." But the more Trotsky saw of the concentration of power in the hands of a new governing elite, the more wary he became.

At the same time, the ideological affiliations of both Trotsky and Stalin in this period seem to have been partially strategic. Each assumed their respective positions at least in part to attempt to position themselves against the other in what was emerging as an epic battle of will. Trotsky recognized the battle lines being drawn as early as 1919, noting, "It is no wonder that my military work created so many enemies for me. I did not look to the side, I elbowed away those who interfered with military success, or in the haste of the work trod on the toes of the unheeding and was too busy even to apologize. Some people remember such things. The dissatisfied and those whose feelings had been hurt found their way to Stalin or Zinoviev, for these two also nourished hurts."

Lenin was the unquestioned head of the new Soviet Union, and upon his death he had firmly expressed the desire to make sure Stalin didn't concentrate power and control over the young Communist nation. Of course, that's precisely what ended up happening. So how and why did Lenin's Testament go unheeded?

Trotsky was in the faraway Caucasus when Lenin finally died in the beginning of 1924, and he reacted by writing, "And now Vladimir Ilyich is no more. The party is orphaned. The workmen's class is orphaned. This was the very feeling aroused by the news of the death of our teacher and leader." But Stalin and his allies took advantage of their rival's absence to suppress documents written by Lenin shortly before his death that pleaded for the reconciliation of the factions. They also used the absence of Trotsky from the leader's funeral as an opportunity to resurrect insinuations about his loyalty.

When Lenin's widow unearthed the document for Soviet officials, it was quickly disregarded and suppressed by Stalin, Kamenev, and Zinoviev, the ruling troika that Lenin had disparaged. Other leaders also went about making sure the Testament had no effect, including Trotsky, who published an article countering its importance and asserting that they were not a will and had not technically been violated. It was a stance Trotsky himself would come to regret in ensuing years as his opposition to Stalin increased.

While the letter made clear Lenin's intentions, it did not have the force of law behind it, especially with the remaining Soviet leaders asserting that it was not a final will. Since Lenin died before he could use his own personal leadership to enforce his wishes, Stalin became the preeminent Soviet leader. At the same time, his battle with Lenin had given him a sense of the bigger picture, and he now saw the wisdom of moving more slowly, especially when dealing with the common people. Therefore, he initially left the New Economic Policy in place and even allowed the farmers to buy up land around them to expand their farms. These larger landowners were known as kulaks, meaning "fists" for the tight way in which they held on to their land.

On the political front, Stalin had other things on his mind. As the General Secretary of the Soviet Union, he courted the favor of Lev Kamenev and

Grigory Zinoviev, two powerful members of the Politburo, to keep Trotsky in check. He encouraged rumors that Trotsky would probably oust them if he came to power so that he could put his own people in power. He also encouraged a sense of his superiority, along with theirs, against the upstart Trotsky, who hadn't even joined the party until 1917.

Ironically, when Trotsky was expelled from a Communist Party now thoroughly dominated by Stalin in 1927, his old enemy Zinoviev was expelled alongside him. Now disempowered but still enjoying popular support, Trotsky was far too dangerous for Stalin to allow to remain in the country. He was sent into exile for the third and final time through Russia's southwestern border with Turkey.

With his political position secured, Stalin turned his attention toward his country's economic situation. In order to make the farms across the Soviet Union produce enough food to feed the ever-expanding population, Stalin learned that the farmers would need 250,000 new, gas powered tractors. Not only did these need to be built, but they would need to be powered, so he also had to find a way to pump and refine the extensive oil deposits lying underground in much of the northern regions of the country. Finally, farms needed electricity, which meant more power plants and wires strung across great distances.

In order to accomplish this, Stalin had to get more factories up and running. They had just barely gotten back to their pre-Revolution level of production, much less seen any growth. However, he was determined, and brought the same force that he had already used against the Politburo to bear on the factories. To this end, he created and enforced in 1928 the first of many Five-Year Plans.

He began by going after the *kulaks*. They tended to grow and sell food near their own homes and villages, while he wanted more produce imported into the cities to feed the factory workers and their families. Therefore, in 1928 he began pressuring them to abandon their independent farms and join together as collectives.

Not surprisingly, Stalin's promises of higher production and better profits largely fell on deaf ears. Though he tried to explain that, as part of a

cooperative, the farmers could pool their resources and buy better equipment, the men and women who had worked the same land for generations were less than enthusiastic. This did not please Stalin at all, and perhaps even stirred up memories of the peasants who had teased him as a young boy.

Frustration often brings out the worst in people, and this was so for Stalin. He ordered his underlings on the local level to take possession of the kulaks' land and have them gathered together into state owned collective farms. Those who resisted were shot out right, including thousands of kulak farmers and their families. Furthermore, anyone else who got in his way was sent to Siberia or Russian holdings in Central Asia. According to Soviet records, about 25% failed to survive the trip.

At the same time Stalin was also determined to see growth in factory output. He set goals for tremendous increases in the production of coal, iron and electricity. He spread rumors that, if these goals were not met, the Soviet Union would be in danger of eminent invasion. He also encouraged factory managers to set high goals for their workers and to publically ostracize those that did not meet them.

Discouraged by insurmountable demands, many workers simply stopped coming in for work. If this became a pattern for an individual, he would be arrested and charged with sabotage by not working hard enough to support the Five-Year Plan. If deemed guilty, the worker could be sent to a forced labor camp, either on the dreaded Siberian Railway or along the Baltic Sea Canal. The worst offenders were shot outright as a warning to others.

To be fair, Stalin did not only authorize threats and punishments to motivate workers. He also pushed the Central Committee to offer higher wages to those who excelled. Committee members argued against what they saw as a betrayal of the egalitarian principles of the revolution, but in the end Stalin prevailed, and by the early 1930s those who developed the necessary skills to serve the good of the people could expect to be rewarded with higher wages.

By the end of 1932, the first Five-Year Plan had come to an end and it was time to evaluate its success. In a report to the Politburo, Stalin

described the results:

1. The results of the Five-Year Plan have refuted the assertion of the bourgeois and Social-Democratic leaders that the Five-Year Plan was a fantasy, delirium, an unrealizable dream. The results of the Five-Year Plan show that the Five-Year Plan has already been fulfilled.

2. The results of the Five-Year Plan have shattered the well-known bourgeois "article of faith" that the working class is incapable of building the new, that it is capable only of destroying the old. The results of the Five-Year Plan have shown that the working class is just as well able to build the new as to destroy the old.

3. The results of the Five-Year Plan have shattered the thesis of the Social-Democrats that it is impossible to build socialism in one country taken separately. The results of the Five-Year Plan have shown that it is quite possible to build a socialist society in one country; for the economic foundations of such a society have already been laid in the U.S.S.R.

4. The results of the Five-Year Plan have refuted the assertion of bourgeois economists that the capitalist system of economy is the best of all systems, that every other system of economy is unstable and incapable of standing the test of the difficulties of economic development. The results of the Five-Year Plan have shown that the capitalist system of economy is bankrupt and unstable; that it has outlived its day and must give way to another, a higher, Soviet, socialist system of economy; that the only system of economy that has no fear of crises and is able to overcome the difficulties which capitalism cannot solve, is the Soviet system of economy.

5. Finally, the results of the Five-Year Plan have shown that the Communist Party is invincible, if it knows its goal, and if it is not afraid of difficulties.

Of course, Stalin's report failed to mention that the collectivization and modernization had also brought about famines across the Soviet Union, the worst of which affected Ukraine.

Alarm Bells

“There was a deathly silence because people weren't even conscious. They didn't want to speak or to look at anything. They thought today that person died, and tomorrow it will be me. Everyone just thought of death.” – Nina Korpenko, Holodomor survivor

Despite the unabating tensions between the Soviet authorities and the Ukrainian *kulaks*, the impending genocide, masquerading as a famine, caught many off guard. In the early 1920s, the Bolsheviks, looking to drum up support from their Ukrainian subjects – the largest non-Russian territory within the USSR – introduced a policy called “*korenizatsiya*,” which literally translates to “putting down roots.” This “indigenization” policy was, plainly put, a reversal of the Russification process that the Ukrainians were made to endure under the tsars, creating the illusion of cultural autonomy.

The *korenizatsiya* was inaugurated by a decree put forth by the Sovnarkom (Council of People's Commissars) on July 27, 1923, which called for the Ukrainization of all local educational and cultural institutions. Another edict issued on August 1, entitled “On [the] implementation of the equal rights of the languages and facilitation of the Ukrainian language,” mandated all public officials to become proficient in the Ukrainian language within 24 months, and all official business was thenceforth to be conducted in Ukrainian. Once the education system was based on their mother tongue, literacy rates, most notably in Ukrainian rural communities, soared. By 1929, adult literacy in Ukraine rose to 74%.

At the same time, more and more Ukrainians were granted high-ranking positions within the republic's administrative offices, as well as the local Communist party. In 1922, Russians held the majority of the seats in the Communist Party of Ukraine, which was composed of 54% Russian and 23% Ukrainian representatives. By 1933, Ukrainians held 60% of the party seats. What's more, all party members, regardless of their nationality, were required to speak fluent Ukrainian, and were to be thoroughly acquainted with Ukrainian history and the local customs. The Bolsheviks even took it

upon themselves to bankroll several non-Communist Ukrainian academies and cultural institutions.

As to be expected, these aggressive Ukrainization policies ruffled the feathers of some CPSU members. Grigory Zinoviev, one of the seven original members of the first Politburo, who went on to serve as the Chairman of the Petrograd City Council, as well as the Executive Committee of the Communist International, was one of the most vocal objectors, for he believed the policy to be a gateway to Ukrainian jingoism and belligerence. Interestingly enough, Stalin dismissed the naysayers' concerns as paranoia and openly defended the *korenizatsiya* for several years, but he would soon change his tune.



Zinoviev

In November 1927, Stalin launched his overly ambitious scheme that aimed to permanently restructure the domestic policy of the USSR. His primary objective was to dismantle the New Economic Policy (a market characterized by a blend of capitalist and socialist principles) that was established after the Russian Civil War to reinvigorate Russia's moribund

economy, effectively eliminating all vestiges of private enterprise and ownership. Only by enforcing the nationalization of all enterprises and rapid industrialization, coupled with the nonnegotiable, complete collectivization of agriculture – in so doing converting the Soviet Union into a socialist state – Stalin reasoned, would the USSR attain (or ideally be catapulted past) Russia's former glory.

Stalin's Five-Year Plan, the first of 13, was finalized on October 1, 1928. Skeptics silently criticized the impracticality of the absurd goals and production targets set by the Gosplan, the state-planning agency. Stalin, for one, expected investment to grow threefold, and for the real national income to double within five years. In the same breath, he anticipated a 330% expansion across all fields of heavy industry, a 250% growth in general industrial development, and a 67% increase in per capita consumption.

The first part of Stalin's Five-Year Plan sought to fast-track the development of the coal, oil, iron, steel, chemical, transport, forestry, machine-tool, electric power, and factory construction industries. The mandatory production quotas assigned to the newly nationalized enterprises across the USSR were as grueling as they were unrealistic, to say the least. Utility companies, for instance, were ordered to ramp up the production of electric power by 335%. Steelworks and iron mills were given target of 200% production growth, and coal miners were similarly expected to scale up their production numbers by 111%.

“We are 50 or 100 years behind the advanced (capitalist) countries,” Stalin asserted. “We must make up this gap in [no more than] 10 years. Either we do it, or they will crush us.” Conversely, rival politicians claimed that the Kremlin Highlander's real agenda was hidden up his sleeve. Stalin had virtually crushed the Left Opposition in 1927 with the dismissal and subsequent banishment of Trotsky, Lev Kamenev, Zinoviev, and other prominent leftist figures, and now he sought to outflank the Right Opposition, fronted by Nikolai Bukharin, Alexei Rykov, and trade unionist Mikhail Tomsky.

The second half of Stalin's Five-Year Plan revolved around the collectivization of Soviet agriculture, in which all privately-owned agrarian

enterprises were converted to state-owned collective farms known as *kolkhozes*. All harvests, livestock, and machinery that belonged to these formerly independent farms were now at the government's disposal. On top of enhancing agricultural productivity, Stalin argued, which would enable the state to adequately nourish the swiftly expanding labor force in the cities, he intended to unload the surplus cereals on the international market. The windfall profits amassed from the international sales could then be used to further their industrialization goals, expand and strengthen the military, and finance other programs.

Stalin addressed his collectivist policies in a speech delivered before the Sovnarkom in 1928: “Agriculture is developing slowly, comrades. This is because we [had] about 25 million individually owned farms. They are the most primitive and undeveloped form of economy. We must do our utmost to develop large farms and to convert them into grain factories for the country, organized on a modern scientific basis.”

Predictably, the highly toxic work environment that now pervaded both light and heavy industries across the Soviet Union, marked by incentive pay, public shaming, and debilitating pressure, did more harm than good. The urban labor, for the most part, fell short of their targets. The increase in iron and steel production in 1929, from 600,000 to 800,000 was inappreciable at best in comparison to previous quarters from the last decade. To make matters worse, the excessive investments poured into heavy industries, which bore little to no fruit, resulted in stark deficits in other crucial consumer goods.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian peasants and farmers, particularly the *kulaks*, reacted poorly to the exploitation of their labor and the suffocating extortion of their property and goods. They were supremely stressed, overworked, and perturbed by the absence of solid contingency plans – and rightfully so. Those in the agricultural field were forced to cough up a minimum of 40% of their harvests, leaving them with practically nothing for themselves, and their once brimming reserves were shrinking fast. The seizure of their land, livestock, machinery, and tools aside, the *kulaks* vehemently protested the painful reduction in their financial gains, brought about by the government-fixed prices imposed on all crops nationwide.

It was at this point that the hypersensitive tyrant, not one to take any form of criticism lightly, unleashed his wrath on the Ukrainian *kulaks*. Before proceeding further, one must note that the peasantry was categorized into three classes. The first, as previously established, were the *kulaks*, who were considered the wealthiest and most privileged of the peasants; under the NEP, the average *kulak* family presided over 24 acres of land, complete with a handful of farmhands. The *serednyak* were “middle class” peasants who owned smaller plots of land and operated their modest farms themselves. The *bednyak*, who belonged to the lowest of the peasant tiers, were impoverished, landless individuals that worked in *kulak* farms.

Generally speaking, the *serednyak* and *bednyak* were in favor of Stalin's collectivist policies, for they undoubtedly benefited from the appropriation and equal redistribution of the *kulaks'* properties. Not unlike Lenin, Stalin cast the *kulaks* as his scapegoats, stigmatized as unjust products of capitalism whose “tight-fisted” ways were the direct cause of the republic's food scarcity problems. “Look at the *kulak* farms,” Stalin seethed. “Their barns and sheds are crammed with grain, and yet they are holding onto this grain because they are demanding three times the price offered by the government.”

When the *kulaks'* outcries fell on deaf ears, frustrated farmers who refused to surrender a single hair of a horse's tail to the state literally took a hammer to their farm machinery and massacred their livestock en masse. Little did they know that the intemperate slaughter of these helpless farm animals, while done to prove a point, would have a lasting effect and only exacerbated the dreadful conditions of the approaching famine. Others stormed into the *kolkhozes*, whereupon they assaulted and in some cases killed Soviet guards and policy sympathizers and retrieved their crops, tools, and beasts of burden.

Secret police squads dispatched to these chaotic scenes were instructed to disarm and restrain these insurgents by any means necessary. Some fired warning shots; others discharged volleys of bullets at unruly crowds indiscriminately, oftentimes killing innocent bystanders who were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. The egregious preventative measures that the secret police foisted upon the *kulaks* for the purpose of quashing

further uprisings grew steadily more appalling. Even those who had no intention of flouting the new collectivist laws were singled out systematically and endured unprovoked beatings. The horror stories that circulated regarding *kulak* mistreatment were chilling. Some were so distressed that they opted to commit familicide, rather than be subjected to the brutal abuse at the hands of the secret police.

On December 27, 1929, Stalin reiterated his plans to exterminate the *kulak* population during a speech on agrarian policy: “During the past year...the Soviet power has developed an offensive along the whole front against the capitalist elements in the countryside...It means that we have passed from the policy of restricting the [exploitative] tendencies of the *kulaks* the policy of eliminating the *kulaks* as a class...[striking] so hard [so] as to prevent them from rising to their feet again.”

He justified his actions by expounding on the futility of the *kulak* class: “Today, we have an adequate material base for us to strike at the *kulaks*, to break their resistance...and to replace their output by the output of the collective farms and state farms...in 1929, the grain produced on the...state farms amounts to not less than 400 million poods, (200 million poods below the gross output of the *kulak* farms in 1927). You also know that in 1929...the state farms have supplied more than 130 million poods of marketable grain (more than the *kulaks* did in 1927)...in 1930, the gross grain output of the...state farms will amount to...900 million poods...and their output of marketable grain will be not less than 400 million poods (incomparably more than the *kulaks* supplied in 1927)...”

The bulk of the *kulaks*, who had been ostracized as “enemies of the people,” were rendered homeless, many of them left with no other possessions than the clothes on their back. They could not fall back on the kindness of Good Samaritans, as extending any form of assistance to a *kulak* was strictly prohibited by law. Non-*kulaks* who were discovered tossing even a single piece of fruit in their direction were immediately charged with aiding and abetting, and they were subsequently sent off to concentration camps or shot to death on the spot.

As time progressed, the definition of a *kulak* became increasingly hazy. Even *serednyaks* and *bednyaks* who voiced even the slightest discontent

with Stalin's collectivization laws were themselves labeled *kulaks*. Some 62,000 Ukrainian “*kulak*” families were dispossessed and displaced in the first quarter of 1930 alone, though some experts believe this to be an extremely conservative estimate. Still, the *kulaks* attempted to stand their ground. 4,000 mass demonstrations against Stalin's collectivist policies were held throughout Soviet Ukraine that same year.

Over the next three years, *kulaks* continued to be arrested, exiled, and executed, with their punishment determined by the severity of their resistance towards the Soviet authorities. By the end of 1931, at least 200,000 Ukrainian *kulaks* had been forcibly ejected from their homes by roaming dekulakization brigades. Entire families – the elderly and children included – were shoved into dark, grotty, and dangerously overcrowded boxcars like sardines, and then they were “re-homed” in “special settlements” deep in the badlands of Kazakhstan, Siberia, and the Urals, and others in state-owned mines and gulag camps. The two-thirds that survived the abysmal transit and cruel living conditions were tortured and coerced into fulfilling the state's irrationally steep quotas through slave labor.

According to some modern experts, anywhere between 1.5 million-10 million *kulaks* were stripped of their homes and possessions throughout the USSR; and an estimated 3 million were executed for their “defiance.”

At the same time, Stalin reinstated Russification policies in Ukraine, destroying all the progress that had been made during the days of the *korenizatsiya*. Hundreds of Orthodox temples, Catholic cathedrals, Jewish synagogues, and other shrines haunted by minorities were razed to the ground. Books and other valuable publications printed in the Ukrainian language were extracted from cultural and educational institutions and set ablaze. An untold number of Ukrainian politicians and academics who publicly decried Stalin's illogical Five-Year Plan and the reemergence of anti-Ukrainian ideals, as well as his brazen persecution of the peasantry were doomed to the same fate, many mysteriously vanishing, never to be heard from again.

Disturbingly, it can be argued that those killed in struggles with the secret police and those who perished in prison camps outside of Ukraine were given the longer end of the stick, as they were able to escape the agonizing

second half of the strategic genocide that would soon unfold, which would claim the lives of millions more Ukrainians – a gut-wrenching figure separate from the millions that died under Stalin's dekulakization campaign.

All the while, the collectivization of Ukrainian agriculture was advancing at a breakneck pace. Much to Stalin's delight, the first Five-Year Plan, which resolved to nationalize 20% of all peasant households, far exceeded its target. By October of 1931, 68% of Ukrainian farms, along with 72% of cultivable lands had been commandeered by the state. It was at this stage that the starvation of the masses became a growingly probable prospect. Economists and other similar experts who cottoned on to the forthcoming catastrophe sounded the alarms, but Stalin and his supporters shrugged off their warnings in cold blood, rationalizing the cataclysmic consequences as rightful retribution for the “sins” of the *kulaks*.

The Soviet regime paid no heed to the instability of the agricultural productivity in Ukraine, caused by standard drought cycles and natural crop diseases, and continued to jack up the grain procurement quotas with no regard for the famished nationals. The 1931 harvest produced 18.3 million tons of grain. The following year, however, at which point nearly 75% of Ukrainian farms had been collectivized – a grand total of 211,000 collective farms and 5,820 state farms – the grain yield dropped to 14.6 million tons. All the same, the compulsory quotas were hiked up from 40% to 44%. Bear in mind that pre-collectivization, peasants were only required to hand over less than 20% of their harvests. The quotas assigned to other USSR republics, on the other hand (less than 30%), remained unchanged.

The 1933 harvest, which generated 22.3 million tons of grain, transcended expectations, yet once again, the lion's share of the crops were requisitioned by the state. At the height of the famine, which lasted from 1932 and all throughout 1933, the Bolsheviks offloaded roughly 7 million tons of grain on various international markets, which could have been used to sustain millions of necessitous Ukrainians.

On February 6, 1932, the front page of the *Svoboda*, a Ukrainian-language newspaper published and distributed in the United States, alerted its readers to the nightmarish tribulations that their countrymen were experiencing for the first time. The harrowing article, titled “Ukraine Cannot Meet Moscow's

Quota For Grain Harvest,” cited facts, figures, and other details from the *Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Soviet Communist Party.

As stated by the state propaganda machine, Ukrainian farms had only managed to reach 75% of their harvest quota the previous year. Authorities pinned the blame on the incompetence of Ukrainian farmers as a whole, as well as the greed of *kulaks* and “party opportunists.” The latter were accused of stashing sizable amounts of grain from the authorities and illicitly pawning off these cereals on the black market. Unscrupulous buccaneers in Yefymovsky raion (an administrative division with its own district council), for one, reportedly failed to hit even 50% of their quota, but had allegedly unloaded 44,000 poods of grain on the black market. These felonious acts, the authorities claimed, were “daily occurrences” in Ukraine.

Several other factors, including the rudimentary, and therefore inefficient Soviet transportation system further contributed to the grain scarcity in Ukraine. Boxcars fully stocked with these perishable products that were due to be delivered to urban populations were often left unattended at pick-up points – at times for several days on end. The authorities had no choice but to discard the rancid cereals.

Although the Soviet authorities insisted that the Ukrainian farmers retained most of their harvests, the author of the *Svoboda* article, who was no stranger to the Bolsheviks' thinly-veiled ulterior motives, took their word with a large grain of salt. Referencing a fiat published in the *Pravda* – “Order to the Bolsheviks of Ukraine to Fulfill its Grain Collection Quota for the Month of February” – the author concluded: “This shows that the Bolsheviks are putting a lot of pressure on the Ukrainian peasants to hand over all the grain they harvested, including the grain they kept for their own needs.”

On March 1st, the *Svoboda* published another article revealing how quickly the situation was escalating in Ukraine. According to a report from the Romanian capital, Bucharest, the Soviet secret police had shot and killed 200 Ukrainian men, women, and children who were attempting to bolt across the frozen Dniester River in hopes that they would be granted

asylum in Romania. A follow-up article published four days later suggested that the actual figure was far greater than 200.

There were apparently so many corpses strewn across the ice, which was splattered with crusted blood, that a special committee had to be created for the sole purpose of collecting and burying the bodies. When a *Svoboda* journalist approached one of the committee members, a Red Army soldier, and requested a comment about the Bolsheviks' repression of Ukrainian runaways, the guarded soldier chose his words carefully. "This is an internal Russian matter," he said. "Every citizen of Russia knows that emigration without special permission, or escape from Russia is punishable by death."

Notwithstanding the scores of Ukrainian peasants who had been gunned down for their escape attempts, miserable Ukrainians continued to take their chances. On March 23, *Svoboda* documented the endeavors of those who braved the hailstorm of bullets with their entire families. One account told of a band of peasants who had led their horse-drawn carts to the now-thawing Dniester on the pretense of fetching some water. In reality, the large barrels in the carts contained their young children, along with an assortment of other essentials. Once they had waded into the midpoint of the shallow river, the peasants cracked their whips and charged forth to the other side. Thunderous blasts of gunfire filled the air. Wagons left and right screeched to a halt, their drivers unable to placate their spooked horses. Only one of these wagons managed to make it to the other side. Journalists pressed the Moscow authorities for an explanation regarding the bullet-riddled bodies of women and children in the Dniester, only to be shot down at once. "We know nothing about the matter of which you speak," a spokesperson replied defensively. "This is an absurd fabrication by enemies of the Soviet Union."

A week later, an investigative reporter from the *New York Times* traveled to the Romanian territory of Bessarabia and visited a few local hospitals, where a number of Ukrainian refugees were recovering from their bullet wounds. One survivor, who wished to remain anonymous for safety's sake, maintained that he did not regret risking his life, as "it was better to die from the bullet of a Bolshevik than to live with the cold, the hunger, and the fear that one day the secret police would cart you off to Siberia." "Everyone

tells the same story,” wrote the correspondent. “They had to flee because of the famine, which they experienced after the Bolsheviks ruined all the peasants' farms, trying to get them into collective farming. Those who guarded their individual farms were arrested and sent to Siberia.” Eventually, the Bolsheviks disbanded the corpse collection committee, opting instead to leave the corpses in the Dniester as a message to those still contemplating their getaways.

On April 23, all privately-owned literary and news publications in Ukraine were ordered to terminate their operations indefinitely. This media blackout obstructed independent journalists from reporting on the true gravity of the countrywide food shortage and leaking this classified information to the international press. The foreign media, however, was accustomed to the lack of transparency and tactical reticence of the Soviet regime and proceeded with their investigative reporting.

On June 6, *Svoboda* reprinted a news item published by *The Manchester Guardian*. According to the findings of their Moscow-based reporter, who journeyed through numerous cities and villages throughout Russia and Ukraine, food supplies and provisions were indeed startlingly low and almost nonexistent in rural areas. Russian urban communities appeared to be the only ones receiving grocery consignments and adequate aid from Moscow and Leningrad (formerly known as Petrograd), whereas the Ukrainians were made to paddle their own sinking canoes. The reporter was horrified by the deprivation in Ukrainian peasant villages, which was comparable to, if not worse than the ghastly conditions of the Povolzhye Famine just a decade ago. The reporter observed, “[The famine] is not due either to a locust invasion, or a drought, or war. It is not even the plague that has brought on the hunger of the peasants.” Instead, he noted it was the government's accelerated collectivization of the agricultural industry that triggered the disconcerting food shortage in Ukraine.

Compassionate residents of Moscow, Leningrad, and other major Russian cities prepared food parcels for hungry Ukrainians, only for all these packages to be intercepted by the Red Guards. Olena Kanarska recounted a story that her husband's grandmother shared with her. His grandmother, then a young seasonal migrant laborer based in Georgia, attempted to send a

care package to her loved ones back in Ukraine, the postal worker ordered her to remove all food articles – both preserved and perishable – from the parcel. Clothes, money, and other supplies were the only items allowed to enter Ukraine.

In their desperation, ravenous peasants in tattered, muddy rags trekked to neighboring towns on foot, where they peddled pots, pans, clothes, and other wares taken from their homes. When – or more accurately, if – they managed to sell any of these items, they purchased food from illegitimate vendors, which were sold at high markups. The going rate for a three-pound loaf was seven rubles (roughly \$35 USD in purchasing power today). Wheat and rye flour were impossible to find; corn flour, the only alternative, sold for three rubles per pound. Scraps of salted meat and ham were considered a treat.

The “Kolhosp Property Decree,” also known as “The Law of Five Ears of Grain,” was drafted by Stalin himself and went into effect on August 7. Under this new law, anyone who was caught swiping grain from the state granaries or any other provisions from collective farms were immediately slapped with a 10-year prison term, and repeat offenders were subjected to capital punishment. The new law set off a tidal wave of arrests and executions. Even starving children who were caught with as little as a handful of grain were granted no leniency. An eyewitness testimony delivered before the US Congressional Committee years later illustrated the Bolsheviks' zero-tolerance policy: “Two women went into the fields in the spring to pick up some blackened spikelets left under the snow. They picked them up, but were later stopped and searched, during which the guards found the blackened spikelets. For this crime, they were exiled to Siberia for 10 years.”

In early October, Lazar Kaganovich (a high-ranking member of the Politburo and head of the CP's Moscow Gorkom) and Vyacheslav Molotov (Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars) made their rounds in Ukraine, accompanied by 100,000 functionaries and military officers. In addition to assessing the progress of the grain production in every locality, the officials scoured every house in the countryside from top to bottom and confiscated all hidden caches of grain. Those caught harboring secret grain

reserves were rounded up and duly punished. The officials were incensed when they discovered that these rural communities had only hit 40% of their annual target, with just less than three months left in the year. Still, they seized what little grain the peasants had for themselves and returned to Moscow.



A picture of goods being confiscated by Soviet authorities

Despairing Ukrainians appealed to Stalin directly via letters and petitions, begging to be granted subsidies or larger rations. One such letter read:

“Honorable Comrade Stalin, is there a Soviet government law stating that villagers should go hungry? Because we, collective farm workers, have not had a slice of bread in our farm since January 1st...How can we build a socialist people's economy when we are condemned to starving to death, as the harvest is still four months away? What did we die for on the battlefields? To go hungry, to see our children die in pangs of hunger?”

Of course, their heartbreaking pleas were ignored, and the piddling rations allotted to the peasants – 200 grams of bread for each household – were

barely enough for two days, if even. Prices of black-market bread and flour simultaneously rocketed, as these commodities themselves were also in short supply. A survivor named Nina Karpenko, who lived in the Matskivtsi village in central Ukraine, recalled how her mother had walked over nine miles to a nearby village in search of food for her children. After several hours of knocking on doors, only for them to be slammed in her face, she was finally able to swap her earrings, along with a gold cross pendant for two kilograms of flour.

Many resorted to using unconventional, nutrition-less ingredients just to get by. Karpenko described an average meal in a BBC interview in 2013. Shredded wheat husks, dried nettle leaves, and a mixture of other grass and weeds – and if she was lucky, a sprinkling of cornmeal – were tossed into a bowl. She then mixed these ingredients with salt and water, kneaded them into small brownish-green lumps, and placed them on a baking tray covered with wax flakes before baking them in a hearth. The grandmother of a Tamara Mykhailets, who lived in Kharkiv, subsisted on scones made out of dandelions, edible saltbush leaves, and oilcakes, which were typically used for animal feed.

The government eventually installed a few general stores in Kharkiv, manned by armed guards, where one could purchase a kilogram of rye bread for 2.5 rubles, but once again, stocks were limited. These shops opened at the crack of dawn and immediately attracted dizzying queues that extended for several miles on the daily. As these stores only carried enough bread for about half of those waiting in line, attempted (and almost always unsuccessful) thefts and full-on brawls erupted multiple times a day. Life, in this case, would not get better with time; on the contrary, things were about to get far, far worse.

The following poem, penned by Ukrainian poet Oleksa Veretenchenko in 1943, encapsulated the grisly depravities that would soon become the norm:

“What has happened to the laughter,

To the bonfires girls used to light on Midsummer’s Eve?

Where are the Ukrainian villages

And the cherry orchards by the houses?
Everything has vanished in ravenous fire
Mothers are devouring their children,
Madmen are selling human flesh
At the markets..."

On November 9, the Soviet Union mourned the untimely death of Nadezhda Sergeevna Alliluyeva, Stalin's 31-year-old wife, who was 23 years his junior. Initially, little was known about the circumstances surrounding the death of his second spouse, apart from the fact that it was a servant named Carolina Till who stumbled upon her body the next morning. Party officials were oddly tight-lipped about the whole matter, while newspapers tossed around nebulous terms such as "death snatched," "painful condition," and "premature death," among other vague phrases, with one publication hinting at complications from appendicitis. It was only weeks later that Alliluyeva's true cause of death was disclosed: she had bled out from a single gunshot wound.



Alliluyeva

To this day, her manner of death remains an unsolved enigma. Earlier that evening, she had allegedly engaged in a heated argument with her husband at a state-sponsored gala. More curious yet, she had supposedly made the decision to divorce her husband and quietly moved in with her relatives a few days prior. The general consensus is that she had shot herself in the heart with a Walter pistol sometime past midnight as her husband slumbered in the next room. Supporters of a second theory contended that it was Stalin himself who had pulled the trigger. Others say that Stalin employed one of his minions to do the dirty work. Naturally, Stalin's camp stood behind the first theory.

This begs the question of why Alliluyeva would take her own life, or why anyone would want her murdered. Some claim that Alliluyeva had become inconsolable after learning about her husband's multiple affairs. Spokespersons for the party, along with some of her contemporaries, attributed her death to mental illness, while some reports suggested that she had been diagnosed with schizophrenia. Others claim that an entirely different motive was at play. Whether or not the fatal gunshot wound was self-inflicted, it is now widely believed that Stalin ultimately played a significant role in her demise. Alliluyeva was said to have been revolted by the Bolsheviks' heinous actions towards the Ukrainians and was unable to live with herself for being married to such a deplorable monstrosity of a man, one who not only masterminded, but willingly enabled the suffering of millions of men, women, and children in the interest of furthering the heavy industry sector of the USSR. Those who placed the pistol in the Bolsheviks' hands posited that Alliluyeva had threatened to publicize the skeletons in her husband's closet.

Alliluyeva's death coincided with the promulgation of a dictum that bore the names of one-third of the villages in Ukraine that had been blacklisted for their repeated failure to meet their quotas. These villages were to be sealed off from the rest of society, effective immediately. Detachments of Red Guards were posted at all village borders to ensure that no food, manufactured goods, or other necessities entered these exclusion zones, essentially signing the death warrants of all the inhabitants within the villages in question.

A leaked transcript of the meeting minutes from a conference held on December 6th, which saw the most prominent state officials in attendance, listed the embargoed villages, which included Sviatotroitskoe in the Troitsk raion of the Odessa oblast; Peski in the Bashtan raion, also within the Odessa oblast; and Verbka in the Pavlograd raion of the Dnepropetrovsk oblast. According to the document, these villages were blacklisted “for [the] overt disruption of the grain collection plan and for malicious sabotage, organized by *kulak* and counterrevolutionary elements.”

The following were the restrictions that were to be imposed on the aforementioned villages, as well as other directives that were to be executed across the republic:

“1. Immediate cessation of delivery of goods, complete suspension of cooperative and state trade in the villages, and removal of all available goods from cooperative and state stores.

2. Full prohibition of collective farm trade for both collective farms and collective farmers, and for private farmers.

3. Cessation of any sort of credit and demand for early repayment of credit and other financial obligations.

4. Investigation and purge of all sorts of foreign and hostile elements from cooperative state institutions, to be carried out by organs of the Workers and Peasants Inspectorate.

5. Investigation and purge of collective farms...with removal of counterrevolutionary elements and organizers of grain collection disruption.”

On December 27, 1932, the Sovnarkom and Central Executive Committee jointly issued a new ordinance entitled “About [the] Establishment of the Unified Passport System within the USSR and the Obligatory Propiska of Passports.” The statute, first proposed on November 15th, set in motion an internal passport system for the purpose of weeding out “superfluous people not involved in production or the work of institutions, as well as of *kulak*, criminal, and other anti-social elements” in Leningrad, Moscow, and other select cities and towns.

Thenceforth, all Soviet citizens over the age of 16 who were natural residents of these urban areas and towns, or were legally employed in state-owned farms, factories, and other nationalized firms were tasked with registering for official residence permits at their local police stations. Anyone who was caught living in these areas without proper identification was subjected to forcible eviction and a lifetime ban, along with a fine of 100 rubles. Repeat offenders were automatically handed a 10-year prison sentence, minimum.

This new internal identification system meant that starving peasants and rural residents from the Ukrainian countryside, who were granted no such passport, were now expressly forbidden by law from relocating to urban areas and towns both within and outside of the republic's borders. The peasants' hands – and feet – were tied, and they could do nothing but rot away in their own decaying villages. It was at this point that the Central Statistical Bureau in Moscow conveniently ceased to publish the census data, among other related statistics of Ukraine, most likely to divert attention away from the dying republic's plummeting population.



A picture of Ukrainians passing by a starved man

Tales from the Famished

“A couple buried their child in the unkempt garden near their house. They didn't dig a deep hole. Soon, the parents also died from hunger. The snow melted and two thin arms appeared, stretching upward from the ground as if begging God to punish the perpetrators of this unspeakable tragedy.” – Alexander Wienerberger, eyewitness

By the spring of 1933, the frightful famine had reached unprecedented heights. In a bid to maintain the illusion of order and the public's trust in neighboring republics, as well as to stave off the prying questions trickling in from outside of the Soviet Union, the Bolsheviks continued to besmirch the reputations of the *kulak* and counterrevolutionaries. An article in the January 5th issue of the *Svoboda*, entitled “The War for Bread,” reported, “Counterrevolutionary Communists along with the peasants burn stacks of grain, [hoard] the seeds, and grind them up in their own homemade mills instead of turning the grain over to the government. Recently, 125 homemade mills were found in the Odessa region.”

These deceptive and thoughtlessly self-serving practices, government officials asserted, had caused extensive and irreversible damage to the already meager rations and resources available, and as a result, categorically endangered the lives of their fellow Ukrainians. In addition to their alleged collusion with these peasant rebels, these rogue communists were lambasted for their indolence and inability to “faithfully organize grain from the Ukrainian peasants.” On these grounds, the Bolsheviks instigated a purge of the so-called counterrevolutionaries within the Communist Party of Ukraine.

10% of party members, mainly from the worst-hit villages, were ousted in less than seven days. Three commissars from the Dnipropetrovsk region, which abuts the Dniester River in central Ukraine, were sentenced to 10 years in prison, while another five were dealt eight years apiece. Three more were charged with sabotage and conspiracy against the state, and executed for their crimes. At the same time, countless more Ukrainian civilians were put to death for pilfering grain from state stores without trial. Stories about peasants who were condemned to death for merely snatching

up seeds that had fallen out of grain consignments mid-transport were not uncommon.

As usual, cynics quietly cast aspersions on the ruthless, trigger-happy Bolsheviks and questioned these allegations of subversion and corruption. While the claims that these villages had failed to fulfill their grain production quotas proved true, albeit for reasons beyond the commissars' control, there was little, if any concrete evidence confirming that they had been in cahoots with the peasant rebels. In truth, the commissars who had been expelled, along with other supervisory functionaries who were also dismissed, were guilty of listening to and following their consciences. These officials were thoroughly dismayed by the nauseating scenes across the Ukrainian countryside, which were steadily worsening with each passing day, as well as the sickening abuse doled out by their colleagues. Not only had they begun to remonstrate with their superiors, they started to disobey direct orders. Some smuggled food across the border, while others snuck extra loaves of bread into the villagers' collection baskets.

In spite of these baseless accusations, ongoing purges, and chronically low crop yields, Moscow continued to deny the existence of the intensifying food shortage in Ukraine.

The second round of party purges began on January 14. The expulsion of previously esteemed politicians – many of whom were influential, long-standing members with a plethora of achievements and decades of experience under their belts – rocked the remaining party members. The message was crystal-clear: the Central Committee would not condone the behavior of any party member, no matter their level of seniority, who stood between Stalin and his policies in any way, shape, or form.

Two days later, the Central Committee constructed commissar posts at every machine tractor station (state-owned agencies that supplied agricultural machinery to collective farms) across the USSR. These stations doubled as the administrative headquarters for the commissars and their personnel, so that they could oversee the daily operations of the local *kolkhozy* more efficiently. Their instructions, as reported by the *Svoboda*, were as follows: “to make sure no one sabotaged government plans; to organize workers into collective farms and factories; to conduct propaganda

for the Communist party; and to punish all who did not follow the orders of the party, [primarily] the *kulaks*.” Weekly progress reports were to be dutifully completed and sent to Moscow in a timely fashion.

On January 21, a total of 45,000 Ukrainian men, women, and children – the populaces of three villages in Kuban (Medvedivske, Uryupinsk, and Poltavski) – were shipped off to the gulags in Siberia and the Solovetski Islands as punishment for their substandard harvests. The previous month, 2,158 families (9,187 individuals altogether) from the Poltava, located along the Vorskla River in central Ukraine, had also been carted off to northern Russia. 1,826 Russian soldiers were taken out of service and resettled in Poltava on January 28th to make up for the lost labor force. Likewise, thousands of colonists from Moscow were relocated to the Kuban villages in later months.

On January 22, Soviet authorities stationed in Kharkiv and other Ukrainian border cities began to enforce the internal passport system in earnest. Within six weeks, another 220,000 Ukrainians were apprehended at the demarcation line. Of the 220,000 would-be absconders, some 33,000 were gunned down by the guards, whereas others were sent straight to the labor camps. The remaining 187,000 failed escapees were piled into boxcars and trucks and escorted back to their villages.

On January 24, a seasoned party functionary named Pavel Potsyshev, who served in the 16th Orgburo and the 17th Secretariat, was hand-picked by Stalin himself to lead the Ukrainian Communist Party; more specifically, he was appointed second secretary of the Central Committee in Ukraine, and first secretary of the Kharkiv Oblast Party. Potsyshev's first order of business, as per his orders, was to resume the sweeping internal purge.

The head of the financial department, along with six other local government officials were arrested for negligence and non-fulfillment of their production quotas, among other duties, and condemned to the gulags. Half a dozen discredited government ministers in the Kharkiv's financial department were accused of “counterrevolutionary activity” and executed for their crimes. This mass cleansing of errant politicians led to the suicides of numerous disgraced politicians (many of them known advocates of Ukrainian independence) such as Mykola Skrypnyk, the former Prosecutor

General of Ukraine and the People's Commissar of Education, who shot himself in his private study to evade the excruciatingly cruel and unusual punishment that awaited him.

On January 28, the *Svoboda* released a statement delivered by representatives from the German Consulate in the Soviet Union: “The people of Ukraine lack everything, including bread, which now is worth its weight in gold. All the trains are overcrowded with hungry people who travel from town to town in search of bread.” These haunting scenes were compounded by the epidemic of violent uprisings that raged on across Ukraine, particularly in the cities of Kiev, Kharkiv, and Odessa.

On April 27, the *Svoboda* reprinted an article originally published in the *Daily Express* in London. The story in question, titled “Ukraine in the Claws of Terrible Hunger,” was authored by Gareth Jones, the secretary of Prime Minister David Lloyd George, who had conducted business in Kharkiv on multiple occasions between 1930 and 1933. The deterioration of the city in the span of four years was mind-boggling.

Upon Jones' arrival in 1930, he marveled at the vibrancy of the blossoming metropolis. Streets were paved with fresh asphalt, and it seemed that there was a new building due to be erected on every corner. In 1931, the famine, while progressively unfurling across the Ukrainian countryside, had not yet crept into the major cities – at least, not noticeably – and as such, his trip was equally delightful, marked by hospitable locals, delectable food, and exquisite scenery. Local authorities, as Jones noted, took pride in the continuing expansion of their urban centers, and confidently proclaimed that their “socialist buildings would soon exceed America's.”

Sadly, when Jones returned in 1933, Kharkiv – which had now shot to the top of list of hardest-hit regions, followed by Kyviv, Dnipropetrovsk, Odessa, Vinnytsia, and Donetsk – lay in utter shambles. Streets and sidewalks had disintegrated, caked in grime and covered in cracks resembling the veins now visible on the pasty-faced, emaciated locals. Structures that were previously under construction had been abandoned, and what was left of the crumbling building sites were now occupied by vagrants and wild animals. Gone were the dazzling smiles and infectious

warmth that once exuded from the city's residents. In their place were hundreds upon hundreds of cadaverous beggars and children, toting alarmingly distended bellies that contrasted with their rake-thin limbs and protruding ribs, sifting through dirt and rubble for morsels and coins.

The poor souls that loitered in the deserted train stations, Jones observed, turned to dark humor as a coping mechanism. “The populace laughs at the Soviet regime,” Jones wrote. “ – laughs bitterly because of its terrible slavery and its slow death by starvation. The bitter laughter through tears and jeering anecdotes have become the people's only form of amusement.”

By the summer of 1933, the famine's crescendo, an average of 25,000 to 30,000 – Ukrainians were dropping like flies every 24 hours. Another report claimed that the figures were closer to 34,560, which, if broken down, meant 1,440 deaths every hour, or two dozen every minute. The month of June alone reportedly claimed 1 million lives. Outbreaks of typhoid fever and dysentery further accelerated the death toll.

The survivors' recollections of this wretchedly insufferable dark period in their lives, as well as the photographs that were eventually divulged to the greater public are incredibly difficult to stomach – even for the most hardened and desensitized of individuals.

A survivor by the name of Fedir Burtianski was traveling to the Donbass mining area in eastern Ukraine in the hope of landing a gig of some sort. What he witnessed at the routine pit-stop in Dnipropetrovsk scarred him for life. “At Dnipropetrovsk, we got out of the carriages,” recounted Burtianski. “I got off the wagon and I saw very many people swollen and half-dead...some...were lying on the ground and just shaking. Probably they were going to die within a few minutes. Then the railway NKVD officers (secret police dispatched by the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) quickly herded us back into the wagons.”

Before re-boarding the train, he caught a glimpse of a chain of boxcars resting on a nearby track. The doors of these damp and rusty carriages had been left open to air out the eye-watering stench emanating from the mountains of putrid grains within – all within view of the starving citizens aimlessly roaming the streets.

Arkadii Yukhynchuk shared the stories passed onto her by grandfather, who originally hailed from the Zhytomyr Oblast, that further demonstrated the unimaginable selfishness of the Soviet authorities and their bottomless enmity towards the Ukrainian peasants. When Yukhynchuk's grandfather was living in Mykolayiv, situated in the southern part of the republic, his father chanced upon a number of strange discolored patches on the ground of an overgrown hill near the family home. Later that day, he grabbed a spade and returned to the hill with his son in tow, and began to break up the soil on these patches. Lo and behold, he unearthed tangled knots of moldy, decomposing germinated grains, which had been buried there by the guards under the instruction of the local commissars. Evidently, the authorities had been unable to sell a large portion of the grains that they had appropriated from the peasants; they would rather hide these sorely-needed provisions and allow perfectly good grain to go to waste than to feed the pauperized populace.

The hungry did whatever they could just to pull through to the next day, and had become hollow, zombified shells of their former selves, waiting for their inevitable deaths. People stole from their neighbors, and women prostituted themselves – in some cases, even offering the bodies of their children – to secure their next meal. Most spent the better part of their days sleeping, so as to avoid the torturous thoughts of food and throbbing hunger pangs, and to conserve what little energy they had left. The guttural wailing of those in their death throes became the soundtrack of their daily lives. Many, however, found these unnerving sounds more comforting than the eerie silence that pervaded their once-bustling villages.

Be that as it may, these villages continued to face relentless harassment from the brigades, who hounded them on a daily basis, turning their huts upside down for hidden grain stores and odd jars of dried pears, pickled beats, preserved cherries, and loose beans stowed away in their attics and cellars. Most of the time, any supplies found were immediately loaded onto the backs of the soldiers' trucks; guards equipped with especially vitriolic mean streaks stamped on these provisions, rendering them inedible, in front of the families. Soldiers also probed the dirt of their dead gardens with the ends of their bayonets or spearheads attached to long wooden poles with the purpose of rooting out more secret stashes of grains or seeds. Some of these

soldiers chose not to allow justice to take its course. Instead of sending them to the gulags, many of those accused of hoarding food were severely beaten, tortured, and raped, then left for dead.

Even those who kept non-grain stores were punished. A pair of young boys who were caught with a barrel of fish and frogs that they intended to consume throughout the next few weeks were paraded around the local commissar post to be named and shamed. As if this alone wasn't vile enough, the boys were pummeled with whips and fists, then hogtied and gagged, and tossed in a nearby field, where they eventually suffocated to death.

Helg Forester, whose grandparents had lost 40 close relatives in the famine, discussed the fate of his father's then 12-year-old uncle in a 2018 interview with *Radio Svoboda*. Whilst rummaging through some dirt mounds in a nearby field, he came across five onion bulbs that had been carelessly discarded – the equivalent of a jackpot during these dark times. On his way home, a guard spotted the boy's haul, and rather than hand him over to the authorities, bashed him to death with his Nagan revolver.

By the late summer of 1933, most of the peasants had depleted their livestock, and were eating stray dogs, cats, hedgehogs, birds, mice, and earthworms – whatever poor critter they could get a hold of. When these critters themselves approached the brink of extinction, villagers began to scarf down grass, weeds, roots, acorns, tree bark, oftentimes poisonous fungi, rotten fruit peels, and stewed leather. On the worst days, many could be seen foraging for and consuming seeds in both animal and human manure, oftentimes falling gravely ill, or fatally poisoning themselves in the process. One woman who happened upon some dried beans was reportedly so delirious from hunger that she scarfed down the uncooked beans on the spot, only to die hours later when the beans inflated in her stomach.

Then, there were those who not only pondered, but acted upon the unthinkable: cannibalism. These macabre sentiments were succinctly captured in a letter that a respectable doctor wrote to her friend in June of 1933, in which she lamented: while she had not yet resorted to eating human flesh, she was “not sure that I shall not be [doing so] by the time my letter reaches you.” This grim reality was also echoed by the OGPU

(Ukrainian secret police), who, though still in denial of the famine, admitted that “families [were killing] their weakest members, usually children, and [used] the meat for eating.”

In one case, a group of family members awoke one morning to the sound of a child's howling cries. When they arrived at the scene, they found their six-year-old relative, her hands and feet bound, next to a roaring fire. There, her father stood, just a few feet away, sharpening his knife. Luckily for the little girl, her relatives managed to untie her and subdue her father in the nick of time. Not everyone was quite so fortunate. In another case, the parents and adult siblings of a young man snuck up to his sleeping wife and slit her throat. They then decapitated her, quartered the rest of her body, which they roasted and consumed, and chucked her head in the pig pen on their farm.

A survivor named Olena Goncharuk recalled:

“We were afraid to go out in the village, because people were starving and they hunted children. My neighbor had a daughter who disappeared. We went to her house. We found her head separated from her body, and the rest of her was cooking in the oven.”

In the same interview, Burtianski also remembered the sick feeling that brewed in his gut when he was approached by a meat vendor in Dnipropetrovsk. As hungry as he was, he was put off by the peculiar color and foul odor of the meat on the man's cart. As it turns out, his hesitance was probably justified. Weeks later, Burtianski was summoned to the trial of a local man and his two sons, who had been charged with slaughtering multiple villagers for food. The blood-curdling testimony of one of the sons evidently stayed with him, for he was able to recite his statement verbatim decades later:

“Thank you to Father Stalin for depriving us of food. Our mother died of hunger and we ate her, our own dead mother. And after our mother we did not take pity on anyone. We would not have spared Stalin himself.”

A survivor named Mykhaylo Naumenko, whose father had been killed for his refusal to work at a local collective farm, was yet another witness to the cannibalism phenomenon that swept through the countryside. After

attending the funeral of his neighbor Tetyana's father, Naumenko, then 11 years old, visited the girl to console her. To his astonishment, he found Tetyana huddled in the corner, but the girl, whom he expected to be weeping uncontrollably, was not crying. "I saw Tetayana eating chicken meat and saw there was a lot of it," said Naumenko. "I approached her and asked her for some, but she refused to give me any. Because it was human flesh."

Tetyana's case was not an anomaly. In Kharkiv, a group of compassionate young women had taken it upon themselves to protect the village children from the man-eating adults by wrangling them up and placing them in an uninhabited shack, which they had turned into an orphanage of sorts. Looking after the starving children, who often cried for their mothers, was a soul-crushing full-time job. One of the women, who chose not to be named, described the fallout:

"One day, the children suddenly fell silent. We turned around to see what was happening, and they were eating the smallest child, little Petrus. They were tearing strips from him and eating them. And Petrus was doing the same. He was tearing strips from himself and eating them; he ate as much as he could. The other children put their lips to his wounds and drank his blood. We took the child away from their hungry mouths, and we cried."

At least 2,505 people were convicted of and imprisoned for cannibalism between the years of 1932 and 1933 in Ukraine alone; keep in mind that these were only the ones who had been caught red-handed.

The smell of rotting corpses that clung to the air in these desolate villages was indescribable.

Initially, fresh corpses were buried wherever they fell, but as time progressed, the authorities could no longer keep up with these one-off burials, for the dead were multiplying exponentially with each passing day. At the famine's peak, hundreds, and possibly thousands of mass graves were dug in every village, each pit filled with a minimum of 15 corpses. Massive cargo trucks rolled through the villages at least twice a day to collect the bodies that littered the streets and deliver them to the nearest communal grave available. Some of those who were heaved into these overflowing

pits, many of them children, were still breathing. There they remained, motionless, for several days, their bulging, soulless eyes still blinking as maggots, lice, and rats feasted upon them, until Death granted its mercy.

Adding more insult to these unfathomable injuries, the Soviet guards showed no respect whatsoever towards the dead. Alexander Wienerberger, an Austrian chemical engineer who was employed at the Kharkiv Plastmas Plant in the early '30s, took the initiative to snap photographs discreetly whenever he could to document the atrocities unfolding in his backyard. Wienerberger told the story of a heartbroken mother who had buried her young daughter with her favorite doll. A fortnight later, the mother was devastated to find the very same doll for sale in the local market. She alerted the authorities at once, and following an investigation, the horrifying truth was revealed. One of the cemetery guards who had been tasked with patrolling the grave site at which her daughter was buried, had been exhuming the bodies in said cemetery, and was chopping them up and feeding it to the pigs at his slaughterhouse.

The Fallout

“A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic.” – attributed to Joseph Stalin

Try as the Bolsheviks did to whitewash the truths about the Ukrainian food shortage, more and more reports from credible insiders were slipping through their fingers.

In July of 1933, a formal appeal for aid, signed by an I. Kosenko, was presented to the International Red Cross Society. “A terrible misfortune has fallen upon Ukraine,” an excerpt from the document reads. “Thousands of people are dying every week from famine in Kiev and other cities...In the countryside, the situation is even worse: people are eating corpses. Epidemics are mowing down the population. In the name of Ukrainian emigres, who are scattered around the world, the Main Emigre Council calls on all international charitable organizations to establish a Committee to Assist Unfortunate Ukraine.” A few weeks later, the Red Cross contacted the Soviet Alliance of Red Cross, as well as the Red Crescent Societies to make plans for a relief program, only for their offers to be brusquely repudiated by the Soviet foreign minister, Maxim Litvinov, who insisted that no such famine was taking place.

When news of Ukraine's plight reached Austria, Cardinal Theodor Innitzer founded the Inter-Confessional and International Committee for Assistance to the Starving Provinces of the Soviet Union. On August 20th, 1933, a press release penned by Innitzer urged world leaders and their constituents to band together and help their starving Ukrainians brothers, who were in impossibly dire straits. “The fact that hundreds of thousands, even millions of people in Soviet Russia died of hunger in recent months,” wrote Innitzer. “ – cannot be denied any more. Hundreds of exciting letters from the [USSR], especially from Ukraine and the North Caucasus, which are famine-stricken, report it, and the same is evidenced by eyewitnesses whose competence is no doubt.”

The open letter continued, “In an hour whose deep seriousness must awaken a sense of responsibility in all mankind, we feel the necessity of calling on public opinion throughout the world for help. Famine in [the

Soviet Union] threatens members of all religions and all races equally. It is already established that that catastrophe still obtains, even at the time of the new harvest. It will in four months reach a new peak. Once again, millions of lives will be lost.”

Nonetheless, little came of the cardinal's heartfelt pleas. Fretful of the unwanted and still-growing spotlight on Ukraine, the Bolsheviks strengthened censorship policies – a combination of restrictive measures and incentives – across the USSR. Journalists – be they foreign or domestic – who adhered to the party's version of events were entitled to palatial homes, deluxe cars, among other similar privileges free of charge, and were given first dibs on interviews with high-ranking political figures, as well as access to typically exclusive zones. Conversely, not only were journalists who championed honest reporting divested of this preferential treatment, foreign reporters were at risk of having their visas revoked and being permanently banned from the Soviet Union. Foreign businessmen based in the USSR who were found to be in opposition to the government were also threatened with the cancellation of important commercial contracts, as well as repatriation.


Still, there were a few reporters who held fast to their journalistic integrity, and attempted to enlighten the world about the brutal truths of the Holodomor, the most notable of them being Rhea Clyman, Malcolm Muggeridge, and the previously referenced Gareth Jones. Described as “an earnest and meticulous little man...the sort who carries a notebook and unashamedly records your words as you talk,” Jones' unparalleled passion for and commitment to his work shone through in his conscientiously-researched and informative compositions. The fact that he had spent several months learning Russian (and some Ukrainian), unprompted, before flying to the USSR to investigate and cover the crisis, spoke volumes about his character.

PEOPLE OF THE TRUTH

THERE WERE THOSE WHO SPOKE THE TRUTH ABOUT THE HOLODOMOR

*"I passed many villages ... Everywhere I heard crying:
"We have no bread.
We are dying!
Tell England that we are swelling from hunger"*

He was the first to speak about the famine in Ukraine, at the press conference on March 29, 1933. He published about 20 articles on the Holodomor in British and American newspapers.





British journalist
GARETH JONES

**1932
HOLODOMOR
1933**

28
NOVEMBER

**LIGHT A CANDLE IN MEMORY
OF 4,5 MLN UKRAINIANS KILLED
BY STARVATION IN THE COMMUNIST GENOCIDE**

A commemorative poster of Jones

Unfortunately, the warnings of these investigative reporters were drowned out by the influx of news pieces churned out by journalists on the Bolsheviks' payroll. The latter journalists abided by the communist censors to a tee. The usage of the words "famine" and "genocide" were strictly out of the question; the only terms allowed were "food deficit," "food stringency," and at worst, "acute food shortage."

Walter Duranty, the Moscow correspondent for the *New York Times*, was one of the Bolsheviks' most renowned mouthpieces. The puppet portrayed

himself as an impartial “realist” who always entertained both sides of the story, yet of course, he was anything but, as evidenced by his confusing justifications for the famine, which he concluded had been “done with a noble purpose.” Duranty, one of, if not the wealthiest journalist in Russia, enjoyed a princely life in the Russian capital, and bore suspiciously close ties with the federal government – as shown by his not one, but two interviews with Stalin. A collection of his articles centered on the merits of collectivization and Stalin's Five-Year Plan even earned him the Pulitzer Prize in 1932.



Duranty

In one of his articles, Duranty even dedicated an entire paragraph to his attempted discrediting of Jones: “There appears from a British source a big scare story in the American press about famine in the Soviet Union, with 'thousands already dead and millions menaced by death and starvation.' Its author...Gareth Jones...recently spent three weeks in the Soviet Union and reached the conclusion that the country was 'on the verge of a terrific

smash'...It appeared that he had made a 40-mile walk through villages in the neighborhood of Kharkiv and had found conditions sad. I suggested that was a rather inadequate cross-section of a big country, but nothing could shake his conviction of impending doom.”

In 1935, Jones was murdered in Inner Mongolia on the eve of his 30th birthday in what was believed to be a botched kidnapping. Some believe that his kidnapping and murder had been orchestrated by Soviet authorities as vengeance for his attempts to sully the Bolshevik name. Lloyd George speculated, “That part of the world is a cauldron of conflicting intrigue and one or other interests concerned probably knew that Mr. Jones knew too much of what was going on. He had a passion for finding out what was happening in foreign lands wherever there was trouble, and in pursuit of his investigations he shrank from no risk. I had always been afraid that he would take one risk too many...”

Abhorrently, the majority of world leaders – many of whom are remembered fondly – willfully turned a blind eye to the barbarities in Ukraine. On the same month of Cardinal Innitzer's press release, Edouard Herriot, the three-time prime minister of France, paid a visit to Kiev. Local authorities spent weeks painstakingly preparing for Herriot's Ukrainian trip, for they knew that the entire world was awaiting the media frenzy that would soon follow with bated breath. To preserve their carefully curated image, Soviet authorities erected *potemkin*, or staged “model villages,” not unlike those utilized by present-day North Korea. *The Atlantic* contributor Ta-nehisi Coates, author of “Grappling With Holodomor,” explained, “Food – meant for display not consumption – was put in the shops. Party activists were brought in to make it seem as though the town was bustling. The healthiest of the starving children were trotted out and coached to give pre-approved answers. Herriot was then chauffeured onto Moscow where he supped on caviar. He would later praise Soviet actions for honoring both 'the socialist spirit' and the 'Ukrainian national feeling.’” On September 13, 1933, the *Pravda* proudly printed a second statement issued by Herriot, in which he “categorically denied the lies of the bourgeois press about a famine in the Soviet Union.”

Further west, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald, who were at this point well-aware of the Ukrainian famine, were more concerned with establishing solid trade relations with the Soviet Union. While Roosevelt neglected to make any public comments about the situation in Ukraine, he ignored the inrush of telegrams transmitted to him from Ukrainian activists throughout the fall of 1933, and he officially extended diplomatic recognition to the USSR on November 16th of that year. Great Britain and the United States aside, other Western governments such as Canada, Italy, Germany, and Poland also decided not to rock the boat and opted against “interfering in the internal affairs of a foreign sovereign state.”

By the spring of 1934, anywhere between 4-10 million had perished from hunger in Soviet Ukraine, 600,000 of them infants and young children. These figures, which many experts believe to be conservative estimates, do not include deaths via execution, homicide, natural causes, etc.. While Russia and other republics within the Soviet Union were also affected by the famine, Ukrainians died at more than twice the rate of other nationalities, the highest death tolls being in Kiev, Poltava, and Cherkasy.

The Soviet dictator poured even more misery onto the population. During the 1930s, Stalin embarked on a breathtakingly brutal policy of persecution, known as the Great Terror or Great Purge. Sending millions to the Gulag, many of whom never returned, Stalin perceived enemies to his rule everywhere, most notably in the military, bureaucracy, and the rest of society. The Terror would be most famous for its “show trials,” during which former leading figures in the revolution, such as Bukharin and Kamenev, who were once Stalin’s rivals, were forced to confess to imaginary crimes in widely publicized trials.^[6] Sentenced to death, these once communist heroes turned enemies of the people became prime examples of the cruel senselessness of Stalin’s rule.

Ukraine, of course, was not exempt from all this, especially since it was considered a potential hotbed of nationalists who both opposed the revolution and also despised Stalin for his collectivization policies. At the same time, the fate of the *kulaks* was particularly grim. As a group, it appeared that Stalin was intent on exterminating them. One estimate

showed that by the end of the 1930s, over 600,000 *kulaks* had been arrested, and over half of them were executed.^[7]

Stalin's megalomania had many targets during the 1930s. Although he was from Georgia, Stalin appears to have taken a pro-Russian position within the USSR, meaning he viewed the other republics as subservient to the Russian center. Stalin is said to have called Ukraine the "weak link" in the Soviet Union and seems to have held a particular animus against its people, as events during the 1930s suggest. That said, there was some attempt by Moscow in the 1920s and 1930s decades to merge Ukrainian identity with communist ideology, to somewhat pacify its people and bring them on board with the Soviet project. As in other centuries, Ukrainian artists and musicians were among the best known in the wider federation, even though they had to be suitably proletarian and their work designed for the masses. Stalin was always suspicious of any kind of "national communism," however, and was fearful of republics deviating from Moscow's line. This is indeed what appeared to happen in Ukraine, as the fighting in World War II would make clear, but the process was accelerated and intensified as a result of Stalin's harsh policies and indifference to the famine.

What is often forgotten during the interwar period was that the west of Ukraine was ruled by Poland, which was also problematic. Poland was one of the beneficiaries of the Treaty of Versailles and Woodrow Wilson's principles of national self-determination at the end of the First World War. The post-1919 states were supposedly democratic, but many of the new states slipped quickly into authoritarianism, coups and oppression of minorities. There were high hopes for Poland, or the Second Polish Republic as it was sometimes called, but Poland experienced weak governments, multiple parties competing for power and military coups in this period. Ukrainian nationalists established political parties and actually sought unification with their brethren to the east, in response to which the Polish authorities increasingly discriminated against the Ukrainians, including violently putting down an uprising in Galicia in 1930, suppressing the Ukrainian language, restricting rights, and treating Ukrainians as second class citizens. The Poles even avoided using the term Ukrainian.

The dekulakization policy was formally abolished the year after Stalin's death in 1954, after which all the surviving *kulaks* were released and deported back to their villages. The previous year, Raphael Lemkin, who first coined the term and concept of “genocide” in his work on the Holocaust, officially classified the Holodomor as a “classic example of Soviet genocide,” citing the “familiar tools of mass murder, deportation and forced labor, [and] exile and starvation.” At the same time, Soviet authorities continued to keep all incriminating information and data about the Holodomor under wraps for decades.

The Soviets were quite successful in their efforts. The abominable atrocities and human rights violations committed during the years of dekulakization and the genocidal famine mostly faded away from public memory, but in 1986, local poet Ivan Drach dredged up this disgraceful period in Ukrainian history in a disquisition regarding the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster. It was, in fact, Drach who gave the famine its name. This was just five years before Ukraine secured its long-awaited independence in 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Between 2002 and 2003, the Verkhovna Rada (the Ukrainian Parliament) demanded the international recognition of Holodomor, and on November 28, 2006, it approved a historic resolution that officially declared the famine a genocide. In April of 2008, the Russian government publicly refuted the Rada's accusations. A spokesperson from the Russian parliament issued the following statement: “There is no historical proof that the famine was organized along ethnic lines.” On May 29th of that year, the Canadian government showed their solidarity with the Ukrainians by passing the Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day Act, which is now observed on the fourth Saturday of November every year.

While the Russian government has since acknowledged the existence of the Ukrainian famine during the 1930s, they still refuse to take any responsibility for their role in the Holodomor, and they remain adamant that the famine does not in any way constitute a genocide. Meanwhile, many countries, including Australia, Belgium, Colombia, Croatia, Estonia, France, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, and most recently, the United States, beg to differ.

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